

The Record

AUTUMN 2023



St Vincent de Paul Society
NATIONAL COUNCIL of AUSTRALIA Inc. *good works*



NEW LEADERSHIP

AT NATIONAL COUNCIL



St Vincent de Paul Society
NATIONAL COUNCIL of AUSTRALIA Inc. *good works*

The Society is a lay Catholic organisation that aspires to live the Gospel message by serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice, hope and joy, and by working to shape a more just and compassionate society.

This logo represents the hand of Christ that blesses the cup, the hand of love that offers the cup, and the hand of suffering that receives the cup.

Our Strategic Goals: Spirituality and Membership, Our Advocacy, Our Governance and Leadership, Our Work Together, Our Sustainability

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The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia acknowledges that we are on Aboriginal land. We pay respects to all traditional custodians. This publication may contain images of deceased members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. They are used with the greatest respect and appreciation.

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The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia consists of 45,000 members and volunteers who operate on the ground through over 1,000 groups located in local communities across the country.



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The new National Council of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia, (rear) SA State President Brad Hocking, Tasmanian State President Corey McGrath, Vice-President Maurice Ryan, Canberra/Goulburn Territory President John Feint, National Secretary Ryan Erlandsen, National Deputy President Warwick Fulton, Vice-President Matt Nunan, (front) NSW State President Paul Burton, Victorian State President Michael Quinn, Spiritual Advisor Sr Therese Haywood DC, Northern Territory President Jocelyn Cull, National President Mark Gaetani, Danny Cloghan, WA State Council Representative, National Treasurer Bernard Meadley, Queensland State President Trish McMahan (absent: WA State President David Kennedy)

Got a story to share?

Do you have a suggestion of an interesting article for *The Record*? Perhaps you would like to write or suggest a story and share your thoughts and photos with our readers? Plenty happens across the St Vincent de Paul Society, but we can't keep our fingers on the pulse of everything. Please contact media@svdp.org.au to discuss how we might help.

On the cover... At a Commissioning Mass on Sunday, 5 March 2023 at St Christopher's Cathedral, Canberra, Mr Mark Gaetani was officially welcomed as the new National President of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia. He is pictured with his predecessor, Ms Claire Victory, and the Archbishop of Canberra Goulburn, Christopher Prowse.

Photo: Robin Osborne

New leadership for St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia

The National Council of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia has officially welcomed the recently elected National President, Mr Mark Gaetani, from Launceston, Tasmania. Mr Gaetani succeeds Ms Claire Victory who had completed three four-year terms on National Council, the last one as National President.

National Council convened over the weekend of 3-5 March 2023 in Canberra and held its first meeting of the next four-year term on Sunday 5 March following the Commissioning Mass at St Christopher's Cathedral to induct the new National President.

The ceremony was led by the Archbishop of Canberra Goulburn, Christopher Prowse, and well attended by local and interstate Vincentians and other supporters of the Society.

Addressing the assembly Ms Victory gave a brief history of the Society, founded by Frederic Ozanam and companions in France in 1833 and in Australia in 1854, and consolidated in 1881.

'The role of President is a serious one with considerable responsibilities,' Ms Victory said.

'The President must look outwards with vision to the poor and to the wider society, the Church and the world in which our humble organisation lives and grows.

'At the same time the role of the President is a ministry of love and service. The President must lead and encourage all fellow members to give generously and wisely of their gifts, in loving service of the poor. It is always the poor who count the most with us.

'The St Vincent de Paul Society as a lay Catholic organisation continues to live the Gospel imperatives serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice, hope and joy, and by working to shape a more just and compassionate society.'

Reflecting on the ceremony, Mark Gaetani said, 'It was heartening to have all members of the St Vincent de Paul National Council and a number of staff members from the National Secretariat at the mass on Sunday morning followed by my Commissioning.

'It was a wonderful demonstration of the level of support that I will receive during my term as National President. National Council secretariat, together with an amazingly committed National Council, offer the Society in Australia their varied skills, experience and commitment to Mission.



During the service Archbishop Christopher spoke at length about the work the St Vincent de Paul Society does in assisting the vulnerable in our communities around Australia. The Archbishop also thanked Claire, the outgoing president for her important contribution over her term.

It was encouraging to have the work of the society recognised by the Church and to have Society members and staff come together and participate in the commissioning service.

I found the experience to be deeply moving, one full of humility and a day that Mary and I will never forget.

The new National Council of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia is:

- Mr Mark Gaetani - National President/Chair
- Mr Warwick Fulton - Deputy President (continuing)
- Mr Ryan Erlandsen - Secretary (continuing)
- Mr Bernard Meadley - National Treasurer (new in the role)
- Mr Paul Burton - NSW President (continuing)
- Ms Jocelyn Cull - NT President (continuing)
- Mr John Feint - Canberra/Goulburn President (continuing)
- Mr Brad Hocking - SA President (continuing)
- Mr Corey McGrath - Tas President (continuing)
- Mr Michael Quinn - Vic President (continuing)
- Ms Trish McMahon - Qld President (continuing)
- Mr Matt Nunan - Vice President (new in the role)
- Mr Maurie Ryan - Vice President (continuing)
- Mr David Kennedy - WA State President
- (Mr Danny Cloghan, WA Vice President, is the WA representative who attended the meetings from 3-5 March 2023). **R**



Members are at the very heart of what we do

In penning my first contribution to *The Record* since my election as the 18th President of St Vincent de Paul Society National Council, I would like to acknowledge and thank all members of the 17th National Council for their dedication and significant achievements over the past four years. What makes these achievements even more truly inspiring is that they were accomplished whilst also navigating our way through the pandemic.

Like all past National Councils, challenges exist for us as we continue to support Society members in Australia to deliver our Mission. Challenges such as the unacceptable level of poverty in Australia and the dire lack of safe and affordable social housing remain a priority for the Society.

Regrettably, inadequate support services and income support for those in our community who rely upon JobSeeker, disability support and parenting payments, continue to put pressure on the Society to fill the void left by government apathy. When did we become a country where governments of all colours expect the generosity of individuals to pay for the needs of the disadvantaged and disenfranchised?

While the Society will always be there for people in need, surely the primary function of government is to offer adequate care for the welfare of its citizens, especially the most vulnerable.

During my term, the Society will continue to focus on the five key policy areas outlined in our *A Fairer Australia* statement; these are poverty and inequity, housing and homelessness, people seeking asylum, secure work, and First Nations people.

As a Society, we will continue to advocate for all of our companions and those vulnerable members of our communities across Australia. The ongoing challenging economic and social headwinds faced by so many will, in my view, place even more of our communities under financial stress. Again, it will be the St Vincent de Paul Society that will continue to be a strong advocate to ensure equity and justice for all.

I sense positiveness in the current social and affordable housing space, particularly with recent commitments announced by the Federal Government and several States and Territories. Amelie Housing Ltd, the Society's entity, is tasked with delivering on the social and affordable housing needs of all Australians in each State and Territory.

National Council is in tune with the social housing needs of our respective States and Territories. As such, taking a collective and collaborative approach to support each other, with a strong delivery mechanism in Amelie Housing Ltd, the Society is in a strong position to engage with all stakeholders to deliver better housing outcomes for many in our communities across Australia.

The current and most recent National Councils recognise and are acutely aware of the challenges and opportunities that face the Society in regard to our membership.

Members are at the very heart of what we do and their daily interactions and conversations with our companions

provide hope, compassion, and much needed support. I am committed to pursuing a member-centric Society. To that end, I have appointed a current member to take on the role of Vice President – Membership to National Council. This new role will be tasked with championing membership at all levels across the Society and throughout Australia.

It was pleasing to be part of the decision-making process that confirmed that National Council will hold a National Congress to bring Society leaders together in late 2023, from across Australia, to reflect on the Society's strategic vision on significant matters relating to the Society's membership, mission and spirituality; and to guide the direction of the Society into the future.

Finally, I acknowledge and thank Claire Victory for her leadership, friendship and contributions at National Council over the past 12 years. Claire has much to be proud of during her three terms, particularly her final term as National President, and I wish her well over the coming years. **R**

***National Council
is in tune with
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Fellow Vincentians never fail to inspire and energise me

This year holds the promise of a significant step towards recognition, reconciliation and justice as Australians are called to vote in a referendum for an Indigenous Voice to Parliament, to be enshrined in the Constitution.

I am also hopeful that 2023 will be the year that our Federal Government takes the long overdue step of significantly increasing the rate of JobSeeker and other income support payments on which so many Australians struggle to get by.

Treasurer Jim Chalmers made some promising remarks in his October 2022 budget speech: about making sure multinationals pay a fairer share of tax, investing in childcare and healthcare, and providing more affordable housing.

However, we now wait to see whether the Government will take further bold but sensible steps to lift Australians out of poverty; it is hard to see proceeding with the stage 3 tax cuts, and continuing to support other schemes which further increase the wealth of the already super wealthy of this country, as anything but immoral when so many Australians have to make daily choices between necessary medication and food.

I live in hope that the Government led by a Prime Minister who grew up in social housing will do better.

On behalf of the Society, I welcome the government's courage in honouring its election commitment to provide a permanent visa pathway for existing Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) and Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV) holders. This has been a contentious issue for years, with many setbacks and disappointments, especially for the refugees and asylum seekers who have faced uncertainty and disadvantage, with limited access to social services, job opportunities and tertiary study.

Enabling these temporary visa holders to access free refugee legal services to apply for a permanent Resolution of Status Visa offers hope to the more than 19,000 TPV and SHEV holders who have been contributing to Australian society for more than a decade, often in rural and regional areas.

Further, those granted permanent protection will now be able to sponsor family members, particularly given the recent cancellation of Ministerial Direction 80.

However, we call on the Government to fully implement its 2021 election platform on refugees and people seeking asylum, including an end to the unfair fast-track assessment process, and resolving barriers to the necessary levels of family reunion.

Looking at the year ahead I am also filled with hope and confidence that our Society is well placed to grow and flourish. National Council as currently composed is cooperative and collegiate and committed to working as 'One Society' in the best interests of our members and companions.

Supported by incoming National President Mark Gaetani and Deputy President Warwick Fulton, I am confident that National

Council will continue to work to improve the Society's governance and to ensure the Society is known as a fearless advocate for Australians doing it tough.

I think it is natural, when your time in office comes to an end, to think about the things you could have done differently or which you didn't quite get time to achieve. I certainly feel that way as I near the end of my term as National President, but my main regret is that the pandemic prevented me from visiting more Vincentians around Australia from 2020-2022.

Meeting with fellow Vincentians never fails to inspire and energise me; we have so many committed members, volunteers and employees living our values every day, and I take comfort in knowing that even if our government fails to take real action to lift people out of poverty, we will at least be there for those who need our help and to do without hesitation whatever good lies at our hands. **R**

I am filled with hope and confidence that our Society is well placed to grow and flourish.



Seeing Christ in those we serve remains central to our mission

On 1 February 2023 and on behalf of the Society I lodged an in-person submission at the sitting of the Select Committee on the Cost of Living, saying the pressures facing Australians are evident all around us, and explaining how the situation could be eased through the tax and transfer system and increased Government assistance.

The Senate established the [Select Committee](#) on 28 September 2022 to inquire into and report on cost of living pressures, the Australian Government's fiscal policy response, ways to ease pressures through the tax and transfer system, measures to ease the cost of living through the provision of Government services, and any other related matter. For such a matter of urgency, the reporting date for this inquiry is of 30 November 2023.

I explained to the six Senators from the major parties how the Society's assistance takes the form of emergency relief (around \$50M each year) and housing support, adding that our experience has been that as the cost of living rises, the demand for assistance also rises.

Of those seeking the Society's help, most people are aged 30-70 years (around 70 per cent) and females are overrepresented (around 60 per cent). Nearly all are on income support and around one-third live with disability.

'Help is needed to cover the basics including food, rent, utilities, transport and medical costs,' I stressed.

The Committee was advised that the Commonwealth's Emergency Relief Fund is now being used as a supplement to Jobseeker and as a necessary additional income to address escalating prices driven by the cost of living cycle. The Commonwealth is urged to provide additional moneys for the ER program in this year's Federal Budget.

Drawing on feedback from our members, I drew the Senators' attention to our nation's chronic lack of affordable and secure accommodation options, saying how this is increasing housing stress – people are sleeping in their cars or living in motels, caravan parks and temporary camping sites.

On a practical note, I outlined certain workable strategies

that would help alleviate cost of living pressures for Australian families, including higher taxation at the top end. These strategies were explained in detail in a study conducted for the Society by the Australian National University, [A Fairer Tax and Welfare System for Australia](#). This research was part of our advocacy campaign for *A Fairer Australia*, launched prior to the 2022 Federal Election and updated regularly in accordance with economic and political circumstances.

A key feature is that we do not believe that giving wealthy households a tax break will ease cost of living pressures, and as a result the Society cannot support the proposed stage 3 tax cuts. We are not alone in urging that this policy, adopted by the previous Government, be repealed.

We also believe that base rate working age payments must be increased – they were inadequate even before recent cost of living pressures. One key pillar for a fairer nation is to increase the earnings threshold for income support recipients from \$150 to \$300 per fortnight. Work may indeed be an effective form of welfare, as the previous Prime Minister used to say, but not so if having a job, albeit part-time or casual, actually reduces one's income.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to the tireless commitment and leadership shown by Ms Claire Victory, our National President for the past four years. She significantly raised the advocacy profile of the Society by being our spokesperson promulgating a fairer Australia for our Companions. We should also recognise Claire's demonstration of Vincentian values within the Plenary Council where she reiterated the teachings of Jesus around acceptance and welcoming of diversity.

I also wish to extend hearty congratulations and a warm welcome to the incoming National President of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia, Mr Mark Gaetani, whose commissioning is celebrated in this issue of *The Record*.

Seeing Christ in the lives of those we serve is a lengthy tradition in the Society that dates back to our founders, and it remains central to our mission. Our leadership continues to provide a wonderful example to us all. **R**

Easter – a reminder of the Call to Inclusivity

BY SISTER THERESE HAYWOOD DC



PHOTO: ALICIA QUAN/JUNSPASH

In his book *Inclusivity A Gospel Mandate* Diarmuid O’Murchu writes about compassion, which he describes as the essence of Jesus’ mission on earth. He describes compassion as so much more than a feeling. It is,

The transformation of the heart, which might also be described as the contemplative gaze, asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish. Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human.

Jesus showed us how to be compassionate, he invited the outsider in and challenged the status quo.

When St Vincent called for his followers - who were serving the galley convicts, considered to be the lowest of the low - to turn the medal and see by the light of faith, he was drawing on this same idea of compassion.

St Vincent was reminding us that all people have dignity and need to be included, no matter what. Jesus crossed many boundaries to include people, he touched lepers, spoke to women, ate with tax-collectors and sinners and broke many of society’s taboos in order to include people.

Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan in their book *The Last Week* write that ‘Jesus’ Passion got him killed’. It was his passion for the kingdom of God, which means the inclusion of everyone and therefore the disruption of the oppression and domination that ruled society which led to his death.

Our Vincentian tradition is founded in this call to inclusivity. Frederic Ozanam reminds us that we need faith and the grace of God to be able to achieve truly inclusive love of our neighbour.

If we do not know how to love God as they loved Him, that should be without doubt a reproach to us, but yet our weakness is able to find some shadow of excuse, for it seems to be necessary to see in order to love and we see God only with the eyes of Faith and our Faith is so weak!

Both men and the poor we see with the eyes of the flesh; they are there and we can put finger and hand in their wounds and the scars of the crown of thorns are visible on their foreheads; and at this point incredulity no longer has place and we should fall at their feet and say with the Apostle, ‘You are our masters, and we will be your servants. You are for us the sacred images of that God whom we do not see, and not knowing how to love Him otherwise shall we not love Him in your persons?’

St Vincent often spoke about mercy and how it is what we are called to:

‘Mercy is the distinctive feature of God.’ We practice it, too, and must do so all our lives: corporal mercy, spiritual mercy, mercy in the rural areas and in the missions by hastening to meet the needs of our neighbour, mercy when we’re at home with regard to the retreatants, and with regard to the poor, by teaching them the things necessary for salvation, and in so many other circumstances God presents to us. Lastly, we must devote our whole life to doing God’s Will everywhere and in all things...

It is this call to inclusivity which is at the heart of the St Vincent de Paul Society. Every day our members, volunteers and staff are reaching out to people in need and including them, letting them know that they are loved. May this time of Easter be a time of grace for us all and may we continue to build a community which is inclusive of all people. **R**

A Daughter of Charity, Sr Therese Haywood is Spiritual Adviser and a member of St Vincent de Paul Society National Council.

CONGRESS 2023



Attendees at the 2017 SVDP National Congress.

The National Council of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia will hold a National Congress in Sydney on 27-29 October 2023.

The National Congress 2023 ('Congress23') will bring Society Leaders from across Australia together in October to reflect on the Society's strategic vision on critical matters relating to the Society's membership, mission and spirituality, and to guide the direction of the Society into the future.

With a key focus on current and emerging leaders, the program will include keynote presentations, workshops to capture the views of members on key future challenges, and opportunities for spiritual reflection and renewal.

'Members are the driving force of the Society and everything that we do,' said National President Mark Gaetani.

'National Council is committed to ensure that members are at the heart of conversations about who we are as a Society and how we can best respond to the challenge of serving our community and our faith in a changing society.

'After a tough few years of supporting companions—and each other—through the COVID-19 pandemic, a series of natural disasters and the rapidly escalating cost-of-living crisis, it is timely to seek members' views and to bring people together through a process of reflection and renewal,' Mr Gaetani said.

A project team has been established in the National Council Secretariate to support the delivery of National Congress 2023.

Updates will be provided through this newsletter and a dedicated website (congress.svdp.org.au), and email updates will be regularly sent out to keep members informed about the latest news on the program and opportunities to contribute to key areas of focus. To subscribe, please email congress2023@svdp.org.au. **R**



From prisons to soup vans and an Order of Australia

One of the most familiar faces on the Fitzroy Soup Van team, Lorenda Gracey, has been awarded an Order of Australia Medal (OAM).

All teachers deserve a medal, but Lorenda's contribution to her community is remarkable – she taught English in maximum security prisons for 35 years and served on our soup vans for 25. The country's highest medal of service seems a fitting commendation for the inspiring 81-year-old and St Vincent de Paul Society is delighted for her.

Lorenda loved teaching prisoners aged from 17 to 70 in Pentridge and Port Phillip Prisons.

'Many of the people I taught had poor home lives as children and difficult experiences at school, so once they got into education in prison, some of them just loved it. They would enroll in all the subjects they could and often turned their lives around as a result.

'It's lovely to get a call from a former prisoner to say they've now got a job and are doing OK.

'It's surprising how many people struggle to read and write and it puts them at such a disadvantage, so that's why it's my passion to teach English. I've also wanted to hopefully inspire people to enjoy learning and do good with their lives. Education is one of the keys to rehabilitation.'

The medal also recognises Lorenda's work serving so many people in need over the years with our soup vans.

'I've had a good life and many people haven't, so I feel for the people we serve. It's not just about food but friendship too because disadvantage can often lead to lonely, disconnected lives unfortunately. I love being able to make that personal connection.'

Lorenda will attend Government House in April to receive her medal, but she doesn't have any intention of stepping down from the soup vans.

'I'll keep going as long as I can,' she says. **R**

Dame Beverley Kerr of the Order of St Gregory the Great

Bev Kerr, the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW's Vice President – Special Works, has been honoured as a Dame of the Order of St Gregory the Great, an order of papal knights.

Bev was conferred the honour during Sunday morning Mass on 22 January 2023 at the St Francis Xavier Cathedral in Wollongong by Bishop Brian Mascord.

The accolade was bestowed in recognition of Bev's lifelong dedication to assisting people experiencing homelessness, poverty, and disadvantage. It follows much behind the scenes work, particularly by Leo Tucker, Executive Director – Mission and Spirituality, to advance Bev's nomination all the way to the Vatican.

On the day, Bev was happy as well as surprised and remarkably modest about being named a Dame in the Order of St Gregory the Great.

'I think I was still, sort of, in shock because I still don't understand why Leo nominated me for that medal. You don't get a medal for doing what you enjoy doing, helping the poor, the destitute, and the vulnerable,' she said.

'I just love doing it all and I'm just so passionate about what I do, I just don't think you need a medal for doing something that you love doing

'From what everyone tells me, it's very, very important and it's a very high achievement but I'm just an ordinary person.

'I'm just an ordinary Vincentian, just doing God's work,' Bev added.

With COVID restrictions no longer in place, Bev is looking forward to getting out on the road again in her role as Vice President – Special Works. Before the pandemic it regularly took her all around the state to oversee them and one of the first places she'll be headed is the Society's Castlereagh Industries and Green Villa in Coonamble.

'We have 72 special works across New South Wales – I travel as far as Broken Hill, Albury, Tweed Heads, and out to Coonamble.'

One of the highlights of more than 20 years as an ordinary Vincentian was being the co-project manager for the refurbishment and opening of Vincentian House in Sydney.

'When I was in DOCS – I was in child protection – we



Bev Kerr at the official opening of Mary's Place, the Society's drop-in service in Ballina, northern NSW for local people experiencing homelessness or in need.



Wollongong Bishop Brian Mascord with the Society's NSW's Vice President – Special Works, Bev Kerr, honoured for her dedication, and her husband Alex.

would have a father and his daughter or a mum and her teenage boys come in because they were homeless. We could place the mum in a refuge or the dad in a refuge but the children would have to go into foster care or short-term care because there were no facilities for them to be together,' she recalled.

'And they would say to me: 'I'd rather be homeless than be separated from my child.

'The Society built Vincentian House, which was for single mums, mums with children, dads with children, families – mum, dads, and the kids.

'I think it was a really important thing and I felt so good about this because those people didn't have to be separated from their children. They could be together.

'Nothing is more daunting than to have to say to a parent we'll place you in a refuge but you can't take your child with you,' Bev said. **R**

Kooweerup Conference couple named top citizens



St Vincent de Paul Society members Deb and Peter Kerr were named Kooweerup Township Committee's Citizens of the Year for 2023. Kooweerup is a town and satellite suburb 63 kilometres south-east of Melbourne.

A number of local Vinnies volunteers nominated Kooweerup/Iona Maryknoll Conference president Deb and her husband, Peter, a former president of the Conference, and the honour was conferred at the annual Australia Day ceremony and awards. Kooweerup had been without a local Vinnies presence for many years after a loss of members due to health and ageing.

With the group's renewal in 2018, Peter became the inaugural president and Deb the inaugural secretary; at the end of the maximum allowed tenure of four years, they switched roles.

The Society provides material aid and support for those in need in the parish of Kooweerup and Lang Lang, and together, Deb and Peter make a formidable leadership team for the combined Kooweerup/Iona Maryknoll Conference. They are essential supporters of their faith community at St John's Parish Kooweerup.

Peter, an electrician, regularly helps fix things around the parish school, church and buildings.

They regularly help out at school working bees, and Deb was a school canteen helper, and a caterer at the many wedding and special event functions run as part of school fundraising activities.

The nomination for the award noted that the Kerrs undertook various jobs in the parish, including regular visiting of the sick, distributing communion after mass on Sundays and offering 'extended family' support to ageing

parents and sick relatives, including providing a home for Deb's Mum and brother.

'Deb is an exceptional child carer, initially for grandchildren, and now even her first great grandchild,' the nominees said.

'She assisted parish priests with housekeeping tasks, and volunteered to support our retired former Parish Priest, who retired back to Koo Wee Rup. They both helped their extended family and supported community members generously over the years.

'But the current support of Vinnies is the most time consuming. When the relief centre at Cranbourne rings to refer a local requiring a 'hand up', they will drop everything and go. They offer food parcels, fuel vouchers, assistance with utility costs, and furniture etc. At Christmas, they lead the organisation of food hampers.'

Both Kerrs come from large families and after settling initially at Lang Lang they moved to Kooweerup where they have lived for over 30 years and raised their six children.

In their acceptance speech, Peter said that in the past year the Kooweerup/Iona Maryknoll Conference was able to help 285 people, 98 of whom were children.

'The St Vincent de Paul Society is prepared to help anybody, no matter what their beliefs and background,' he said.

Prior to European settlement, Kooweerup was the country of the Bunurong Aboriginal people. The town's name derives from their name *Ku-wirup*, believed to mean 'plenty of blackfish' or 'blackfish swimming'. Today it is Australia's largest asparagus-growing district as well as being a beef-farming and potato-growing area.. **R**

NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards



Vincentian Ian Wray (left) receiving his award from Deputy Mayor, Dubbo Regional Council, Richard Ivey.

Volunteering helps scratch the itch

After a life of working for his own business, Ian Wray from Dubbo, NSW found himself retired at 66 and itching for something to do. Wanting to continue working with the community, Ian began volunteering for the Society through the local St Brigid's Parish.

He'd never expected to be among the outstanding individuals recognised as part of the NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards. Ian took home the 2022 Orana Senior Volunteer of the Year for his efforts within St Vincent de Paul Society and beyond.

Now into his seventh year with the Society, Ian has taken up multiple responsibilities to help keep the show running.

'My main work is care and support which is identifying what we can do to assist the people who come to us,' says Ian.

'I run the food pantry as well and I look after the furniture and accommodation for domestic violence survivors. It all comes through Vinnies.'

The St Brigid's Conference has assisted 336 people in the past year in the Dubbo area. Three-quarters of people assisted came due to lack of food. Most people assisted are living in social housing or renting and 39 per cent of people are under housing stress.

Ian is no stranger to wearing different hats to support the community: 'I enjoy it! I'd go mad if I wasn't doing a 12-hour day!'

One of Ian's volunteer roles involves being a bus driver for a nursing home.

'My mum went into a nursing home in her last few weeks of life. When I was over there, I was talking to them and they didn't have a bus driver for their bus!'

Now Ian drives the bus once a fortnight and brings the retirees out for morning tea and lunch.

There are only two priests in Dubbo, so Ian also finds time to help co-run the communion service every Sunday for the St Brigid's Parish.

He has served for various organisations throughout his life, including the Dubbo Rescue Squad and has worked as an honorary ambulance officer.

Upon being asked how he feels about the award he says, 'Overwhelmed and embarrassed, because I'm part of a very small hardworking team. I've got people in that group that work as hard as I do. We just do it because we want to do it.'

Ian hopes to inspire a new generation to get involved in the community through volunteering.

'Whatever group you choose to work for, you're working at the ground level with people who really need help. It's a really big step for those people to come through our doors and ask for help.'

'I walk away and smile sometimes and think, 'Gee, I really made a difference to that person's life.' **R**

A 'stalwart' epitomising the Vincentian ethos

BY ROBERT CROSBY



At the age of 92, Eric Atkins calls time on Society work.

Bringing up close to five decades of service as a member and president of the Lindfield conference, Eric Atkins has called time on his tenure with the Society, retiring at the age of 92.

'It's added a bit more purpose to my life,' Eric reflects.

Growing up in Dungog – 'the capital of the Hunter Valley' – Eric left home at 16 to work with the NSW Forestry Commission. Spending 42 years in the public service, including time as chief of the administration division of the Forestry Commission of NSW, work and family led him to Lindfield in the north of Sydney.

Purchasing a property in 1965, where he and his wife raised six children, Eric continues to reside in the same home to this day. First becoming involved with the Society in 1972 following a call for members from the altar at Mass, Eric's early visitations left an indelible impression of the disadvantage occurring within his community.

'It showed me the other side of life that there were people going hungry. There were people in need, even in a place like Lindfield, which is a reasonably affluent suburb (or supposed to be).'

Going on to take on a role as treasurer a year later, before becoming conference president in 1996 – a position he acted in for more than two decades – he received an Apostolic Blessing in 2014 from Pope Francis in recognition of decades of service.

'That was a very high honour that I received. It was presented to me by the local Parish priest at a Mass one day; it came as a bit of a surprise actually, I didn't realise it was happening. People further up the line at the Chatswood region organised it. It was a very proud moment.'

Having worked alongside Eric for many years, Bradley Jones, current Lindfield-Killara Conference President, regards him as a 'stalwart' epitomising the Vincentian ethos.

'His commitment to service of the poor has been an inspiration to many, me included. His retirement is truly well earned.'

Making the decision to retire from Society duties in his older age and to allow a new approach to take place, Eric's hope is for more people to take up the cause of the Society.

'I sometimes think there's a lot of people in society, particularly people when they retire, [who] should give a little bit more attention to provide assistance to those who are not as well off as they are,' says Eric.

'There's plenty of people around who don't know where their next meal's coming from; just do something to help those less fortunate than themselves.' **R**

Robert Crosby is media coordinator with St Vincent de Paul Society NSW.



Volunteer Conference held in Canberra

BY CASSANDRA BULL

On 13-14 February, Society representatives from across Australia joined with 580 delegates and a further 300 online for two days of presentations, panels and workshops regarding the state of volunteering in Australia.

The Conference was a great opportunity for Society representatives to learn more about the newly launched National Strategy for Volunteering 2023-2033; as well as learn from other organisations which have faced similar challenges in volunteer retention, particularly due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Workshops included sessions focusing on Innovating with technology, regional and rural perspectives, innovating with impact, volunteering in Australia research, and student volunteering, amongst many others.

Brendan Podbury, Northern Central Council President, Victoria offered these insights:

‘As we are coming out of Covid-19, being able to meet

and share the Vincentian story with many delegates from such a wide collection of volunteer organizations from across Australia was wonderful.

‘I was constantly thinking of how will we, the Society, step confidently into the future, how can we be innovative, how can we attract and retain new members, what leadership training can we offer, are we open to new ways of thinking about recruiting, retaining and empowering new leaders.

‘A great way to kick off 2023.’

As the membership research project moves into the next stage of operation with a journey towards Congress 2023, I commend the National Strategy for Volunteering 2023-2033 to you, as a reflection point for how the Society also continues to innovate and grow in an ever-changing environment to remain sustainable now and into the future. **R**

Cassandra Bull is National Manager Membership, Mission & Youth



Membership Network meets face-to-face

On 15 and 16 February 2023, members of the National Membership Network gathered in Canberra to unpack the current Membership Renewal work being led by National Council, and to learn from each other about what grass roots initiatives are occurring across the country which could be beneficial to other conferences facing similar challenges.

It was an agenda-packed two days, with international guests from England and Wales, Ireland, USA and NZ joining one of our sessions regarding Membership Revitalisation.

There are a number of key initiatives that will continue to be explored by the Network in 2023, including a planned Vinnies Revitalisation Month for September 2023. It is hoped this will be a chance for all members of the Vincentian Family to join with their local communities to celebrate the good works that are happening each day across the country.

We know that we need to tell our story more in order to attract new people to join our works, and so we hope with the celebration of two special Feast Days and a particular focus in each state/territory on Membership this will be a successful campaign.

There will be more information shortly regarding the planned Congress 2023, as well as other ways your conference can stay involved in the Membership Revitalisation conversation. **R**



New inner-Sydney Vinnies shop opens

Not long after marking the centenary of the Society's retail activities in the state, Vinnies NSW has opened its first new inner-Sydney retail shop in 10 years.

Kicking off the year in style, the shop at 547 Crown Street, Surry Hills highlighted a curated collection of premium brands that quickly flew off the racks.

'This is a really exciting time to be a fan of vintage clothing and part of the hunt for treasure Vinnies Shops customers engage in every time they come through our doors,' NSW Acting CEO, Yolanda Saiz, said.

The Crown Street shop joins more than 220 other shops throughout NSW. It will also specialise in selling furniture and books.

'As always, customers making purchases in Vinnies Shops will be raising money to help people experiencing disadvantage and re-using items that would likely otherwise end up in landfill,' Ms Saiz said.

'Every day our logistics team transports more than 14 tonnes of goods, mostly clothing, from donation points to our sorting facilities and on to our shops and services.

NSW State Council President, Paul Burton, added, 'Every day, our members are able to provide help to people experiencing hardship because of the funds raised by Vinnies Shops.

'In the first quarter of this financial year, we've seen a 20% increase in the number of people seeking help from the Society. Our ability to raise funds to meet this increasing need makes the opening of new Vinnies Shops like Crown Street vitally important.

'Being a customer at a Vinnies Shop helps us provide assistance to people who are most in need. It also helps us carry on the proud tradition the Society established more than 100 years ago, with its first shop, when we reuse and recycle quality clothing and goods,' Mr Burton said. **R**



‘Volunteering with Vinnies really turned my life around’

BY DAVID SETTELMAIER

When Leanne Napier (*pictured above*) started volunteering at Vinnies she was in a dark place. But her role gave her a purpose, joy and eventually full-time work. She has a big heart for her volunteers, and she even found love through Vinnies.

How did you become involved with Vinnies?

I was on my own with two kids. I didn't have anything on my CV, and I struggled to find work. There were lots of negative things going on. I got really down and depressed. I wasn't in a good mental place. Then I saw an ad on Facebook looking for volunteers, and I thought I'd give it a go.

It wasn't like I was getting a job - I was only giving up my time. I was excited to get up and do something. I really fell in love with the role. I loved the diversity of it. First, I became a keyholder at the Clarkson store, and then I became a team leader. I worked part-time at the Clarkson store, and now I'm a full-time manager of the Osborne Park store.

What do you enjoy the most about your role?

The volunteering side of things is still really important to me. I pay attention to the volunteers' own journeys and their stories. That's why I invite them over on Christmas Day, and I remember their birthdays.

One young woman in particular comes to mind. She has special needs and came to volunteer with a support worker. Since then, she's progressed in leaps and bounds, and now she works on her own and performs all the different roles around the store.

What do you get back from volunteering?

Volunteering with Vinnies really turned my life around. It gave me a purpose and a goal. Things are really good now. I even met someone at Vinnies... we've moved in together! **R**

David Settelmaier is Media and Communications Coordinator, St Vincent de Paul Society WA



Vinnies support for Ukrainians in WA

Just a year ago, Stanislav Khomich (*pictured with Ukrainian Association President Mykola Mowczan*) thought of Australia as a distant land he would probably never visit. Now the 35-year-old Ukrainian calls Perth home, far away from the horrors of war and occupation.

'Stas', as his friends and family call him, worked as a legal assistant in the city of Cherkasy, about 150 kilometres southeast of the capital, Kyiv. When Russian forces invaded his homeland on 24 February 2022, he helped his community organise supplies.

But when the situation got worse, he fled to Romania, then to Germany. He heard that some friends had come to Australia, and on an early morning in July last year, he stepped off the plane in Perth.

'It was a very different feeling,' he recalls.

'Being in Romania and in Germany before, it felt like home, but Australia is just so different.'

Since his arrival, he has been supported by a partnership between Vinnies and the Ukrainian Association of WA, and it's made a real difference.

'This is not a holiday for me and for other Ukrainians who have fled the war. The support is very meaningful to me, to us,' Stas says.

Vinnies considers the needs of individuals and families, and then provides them with the assistance they require. To date, almost 50 Ukrainians have received help with things like food and clothing.

Ukrainian Association President Mykola Mowczan is proud of the partnership with Vinnies.

'It's been so important to the Ukrainian community here in WA,' he says.

'It just gives people that little bit extra to help get them by.'

Stas now attends English classes at TAFE, and he loves exploring his new home by visiting places like Yanchep National Park and Elizabeth Quay.

Thanks to donors and supporters, Stas is safe and can plan for a future when the war and the occupation in Ukraine ends. He's taking each day as it comes, but he's committed to giving back when he can.

'Right now, there's no sense in worrying. We just have to deal with things as they happen,' he says.

'But when the war ends and there is peace, I'd like to work in human rights.' **R**



PHOTO: JHON DAVID/UNSPLASH

Government urged to increase social security and affordable housing

Incoming St Vincent de Paul Society National President, Mark Gaetani has called on the Albanese Government to immediately increase social security payments and address the crisis in affordable housing.

Mr Gaetani told members of the Senate Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Poverty in Australia on 28 February 2023 that the Society was witnessing unprecedented demand for support as more Australians struggle to survive the cost-of-living crisis.

‘We are seeing a huge spike in demand for support across the country—more than 20 per cent in NSW, for example—from Australians slipping further into disadvantage,’ Mr Gaetani said.

‘The Society believes that a fair Australia is one in which everyone can live with dignity. ‘Income support payments were designed to provide a safety net to allow Australians to live with dignity and to contribute to their families and the community.

‘Over the past 20 years successive governments have failed to ensure income support payments keep up with the cost of living. Today, JobSeeker and other payments

are brutally low and trap recipients in cycles of ever-increasing poverty and despair.

‘No one deserves to live in poverty,’ he added.

Mr Gaetani said the Society calls on the Government to commit to halve child poverty by 2030 and to back this up with clear, measurable targets and actions to achieve this goal.

‘Our members are on the frontline of the housing crisis and are witnessing a growing number of people being forced to live in tents and cars, and people in full-time work—or working multiple jobs—unable to afford a roof over their heads.’

The Society is also calling on the Government to urgently review Commonwealth Rent Assistance with a view to lifting it by 50 per cent and increasing private market incentives, such as an alternative to the National Rental Affordability Scheme.

The Society’s full submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Poverty in Australia is available [here](#). **R**



PHOTO: ALEXANDER DUMMER/UNSPASH

An ally for gender equity

BY MARK GAETANI

National President

Along with encouraging the community to ‘embrace equity’ the Australian organisers of International Women’s Day (8 March) 2023 stress that ‘allies are incredibly important for the social, economic, cultural, and political advancement of women’.

Based on the personal experience of our members and shop volunteers — the majority of whom are women — the St Vincent de Paul Society is a longstanding ally in the campaign for gender equity. Moreover, the majority of those whom we assist are also female.

The sad fact is that women aged over 50 are the fastest growing demographic in the poverty cycle in our nation. If working, they face inequitable wages, and their savings and super balances are markedly lower than men’s.

This makes many women susceptible to insecure housing or even homelessness, vulnerable to assault, and exclusion from wider society, with severe risk of mental health issues.

Recently I delivered the Society’s submission to the Inquiry into the Extent and Nature of Poverty in Australia which is being conducted by the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs. The statistics in our report reveal an alarming state of affairs.

Of the people seeking urgent assistance from the Society some 60 per cent are female and around one-third are single parent families, a disproportionate number of them reliant on the mothers. Behind every set of figures lie the human stories of hardship, with causes including illness, accident, relationship breakdown and job loss, mostly unexpected and unpredictable.

In the Society’s submission to the Inquiry, we included case histories provided by our conference members who meet with people seeking assistance. Many of those we help have never approached a charity before, which confirms that financial conditions are getting tougher.

These personal stories encompass family and domestic violence, housing and homelessness, and household debt. Many women and their dependents are challenged across all these areas, with 1-in-6 women having experienced physical and sexual violence by an intimate partner since the age of 15 years.

A 70-year-old woman had six grandchildren in her care after they lived in squalor in a caravan with parents. The experiences of poverty caused issues with their social development. The Society has been able to give them a better chance for a decent life.

The Society also helped a single mother with two kids after the business she worked for suddenly closed. The JobSeeker payment was not enough to pay for rent on a three-bedroom home and food for children. The family was unable to secure another affordable rental and after the 17-year-old son moved in with a family friend the mother and her young daughter slept in their car for several weeks.

These and so many more stories typify our commitment to supporting the safety and equity of Australian women. This flows from our mission of serving Christ in the poor with love, respect, justice, hope and joy, and working to shape a fairer and more compassionate society. **R**

A new era of decency?

The Albanese Government's decision to provide a permanent visa pathway for 19,000 asylum seekers holding Temporary Protection and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas heralded a 'new era of decency'. But as TIM McKENNA, ADAM HENRY AND ROSE BEYNON explain, there is still a long way to go.

The 19,000 people on a Temporary Protection Visa (TPV) and a Safe Haven Enterprise Visa (SHEV) have languished in uncertainty for years, unable to access adequate support, government services or secure employment. This change is a watershed moment in the punitive undercurrent that links the treatment of those on TPVs and SHEVs to 'stopping the boats'.

All current TPV and SHEV holders will be able to apply for the new *Resolution of Status Visa*, which will offer pathways towards citizenship and the rebuilding of lives. These 19,000 will now have fair access to family reunion through the Humanitarian Visa stream or the Family Visa stream. The ALP platform notes that family reunion for refugees is important to successful settlement. We welcome the Government's decision to cancel the previous Government's *Ministerial Direction 80*, which gave the lowest priority for family reunion to people who arrived here by boat.

The Society welcomes the implementation of this Government's election promise.

However, the Government remains committed to its predecessor's Operation Sovereign Borders policy, which includes 'turning back' boats and maintaining Australia's inhumane and expensive offshore processing. NB: arriving in Australia by boat is not illegal under international law while 'turn backs', or holding people for years in offshore detention, is inconsistent with our international treaty obligations.

The Society's longstanding position is that refugees and people seeking asylum should be able to live in the community while their applications are finalised. This is more humane, time efficient, and far more cost effective. Any person deemed an adverse security risk can always be detained.

In the October 2022 budget, the Government took no action to implement its platform commitment to granting people seeking asylum access to 'appropriate social services', including a financial safety net.

Further, it has left in place the unfair fast track process, despite the ALP platform's committing to abolishing it. So thousands of people seeking asylum still face the unfair assessment of their refugee claims, in particular those whose temporary protection has been unsuccessful on appeal and who can only have the decision reviewed by Ministerial intervention.

Those refused must leave Australia, with the only avenue available being the application of credible new claims requesting Ministerial intervention.

Since late 2022 the Government has been releasing small numbers from detention in line with the ALP platform for a more humane, risk-based approach. In December, about one hundred people were released because of a court order but two months later legislation retrospectively negated that decision.

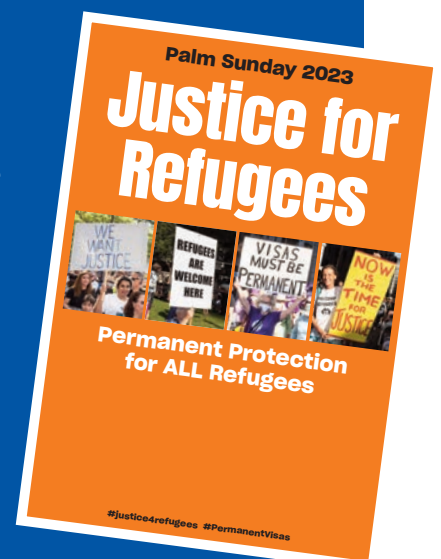
In relation to offshore processing, small numbers of people are being moved to safe third countries, again in line with the ALP platform. Yet the pace of resettlement is far too slow and current programs do not have sufficient places for all (either still offshore or medevac'd to Australia) to be found a safe home in another country.

Worse, the Government is no longer accepting its obligations to the people in Papua New Guinea and continues to implement the previous Government's decision to abandon any responsibility for the welfare of the people still there.

The Society supports the ALP platform to increase the humanitarian program to 27,000 places each year and urges the provision of 5,000 additional places for community sponsored refugees by 2025-26. **R**

Dr Tim McKenna is chair of the Vincentian Refugee Network, Dr Adam Henry is Senior Policy Officer, St Vincent de Paul Society, Rose Beynon is National Director, Policy and Research, St Vincent de Paul Society.

Vincentians and all Australians are invited to attend the annual rallies calling for refugee justice, to be held across the country on Palm Sunday (2 April 2023). The times and locations of these rallies can be found on the [Australian refugee action network website](#).



BY ROBIN OSBORNE

Does Australia Love its Neighbour?

Rebecca Lim and friends
Boolarong Press 262pp

Quirky self-described as a 'World citizen, traveller, free spirit, migration and community engagement practitioner and educator', Australian-born, Singapore-raised Rebecca Lim has a lengthy involvement with refugee and asylum seeker issues.

She is a member of Catholics for Refugees Queensland, the St Vincent de Paul Society Queensland Social Justice Committee and the Vincentian Refugee Network. She has visited detention centres on the Australian mainland and offshore islands, including a contract stint for the government, about which she cannot write directly. She has seen at first-hand the often-callous treatment meted out to people coming to our shores, desperate to avoid harsh treatment, even death, back home.

To simplify her conclusions, 'Refugees are not the problem. It is conflict, persecution and the lack of peace building that cause refugee flows... More often than not, people are not running towards something, but away from something.'

In other words, when the 'push' factor outweighs the 'pull', there is no choice but to flee, even by boat.

In this disturbing, multi-focused examination of Australian authorities' decades-long treatment of people seeking asylum she is joined by fourteen contributors with similar experience in this field. All are volunteers, many of them inspired by Christian principles.

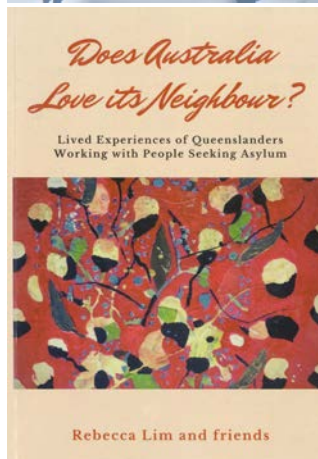
During the time of Jesus, as Fr Pancras Jordan, OP observes, the downtrodden were considered outcasts, yet 'What is most significant in Jesus's attitude is that he closely identified himself with these people, mixing with them and taking their side... the criterion for a Christian believer to enter eternal life is based on welcoming and rendering hospitality to strangers.'

Ms Lim explains that, 'Many of us have long term connections with the men from Manus Island and people from Nauru. The group has provided continued support to the people transferred from offshore since their arrival in Australia.'

The book starts with an overview of policy, a sad continuum that began in 1992 when the then-Labor government introduced mandatory indefinite immigration detention for anyone arriving by boat.

'It also included a policy of boat tow backs and turn-backs, that is not permitting boats to touch Australian soil and returning them to their point of departure.'

Despite some recent humanising of asylum seeker policy, the emphasis on stopping boats continues – and is now being emulated by the UK Government – although



as contributor Steven Jorgensen notes, 'Refugees are neither criminal nor illegal despite political arguments to the contrary.'

Beginning his essay with a quote from Orwell's *Animal Farm*, Jorgensen recounts conversations with detainees and concludes that the Australian response to asylum seekers resembles a 'descent into totalitarianism.'

Bleakness infuses all the contributions, which conclude with a raft of recommendations aimed at providing certainty and giving refugees a permanent home. One priority, Ms Lim writes, is offering an apology to the people concerned and holding a public enquiry into the activities of government(s).

Slight chance, one would think. Similarly, the call for a Royal Commission into the handling of asylum seekers this century.

Rebecca Lim lists questions that need answering, not least, 'How does the Government justify breaches of the UN Refugee Convention, which requires refugees and people seeking asylum are provided with a standard of living that is humane and dignified?'

The media also draws flak for 'demonising the stranger and perpetuating the narrative that seeking asylum by boat is "illegal".'

The only bringers of light are the book's authors whose commitment has done much to help thousands of people undeserving of the treatment received during their exodus. **R**



Launching *Let's Build a Fairer Australia!* campaign

The Spring 2022 edition of *The Record* provided an overview of the 2022 Federal Election results and work that was underway by National Council to re-develop the Society's advocacy materials in light of the new Federal Government's mandate and policy priorities.

National Council's Social Justice Advisory Committee and Vincentian Refugee Network have been working with the National Council Secretariate and National Council to produce materials that reflect the views of the Society, identify what has been committed to by Government and where the social policy gaps remain.

This work is just about finished and the Society is aiming to launch its updated advocacy materials under the banner, *Let's Build a Fairer Australia!* in May.

The five key policy areas remain unchanged but priorities have been reviewed:

- Income Support, Poverty and Debt – Why Australia Needs Proper Safety Nets
- Combatting Homelessness, Increasing Affordable Housing
- Australia's First Nations People
- Secure Work and
- People Seeking Asylum

You will no doubt have noticed that public discourse is turning to tax reform. In April 2022 the Society commissioned the Australian National University to conduct economic modelling that would enable the Government to increase Commonwealth Rent Assistance and working age payments in a budget neutral way.

This paper, *A Fairer Tax and Welfare System for Australia* ([CSR Research Note 1/22](#)) is now being updated and will be launched as part of the *Let's Build a Fairer Australia!* package.

The author, Associate Professor Ben Phillips, is a member of the Government-appointed Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee, tasked to advise Government on how to address disadvantage and boost economic participation. Its primary functions will be to provide advice on economic inclusion, including policy settings, systems and structures, and the adequacy, effectiveness and sustainability of income support payments ahead of every Federal Budget.

The Committee will consider the Government's fiscal strategy, existing policies and the long-term sustainability of the social security system as it undertakes its work.

Keep an eye out for more information through our website, Good Works eNewsletter and this publication on further details of the launch, including members' webinars. **R**



PHOTO: PHOTOFEST/UNSPASH

“A Proposed Law: to alter the Constitution to recognise the First Peoples of Australia by establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice. Do you approve this proposed alteration?”

- Wording of referendum question announced by Prime Minister Anthony Albanese on 23 March 2023.

The Society’s position on The Voice and Constitutional Recognition of Australia’s First Nations peoples aligns with that of the Catholic Church – we support the Uluru Statement from the Heart including Constitutional Recognition and The Voice to Parliament.

The upcoming referendum on an Indigenous Voice to Parliament will be an historic event. There will be much discussion and debate, and both sides will put forward their arguments. There will be diverse opinions and no doubt disagreements. As a democratic society, people are free to form their own views and inform themselves of the issues.

Advocacy is enshrined in our governing document, *The Rule* -

The Society helps the poor and disadvantaged speak for themselves. When they cannot, the Society must speak on behalf of those who are ignored. (Part I, #7.5)

And further in our Vision -

The St Vincent de Paul Society aspires to be recognized as a caring Catholic charity offering “a hand up” to people in need. We do this by respecting their dignity, sharing our hope, and encouraging them to take control of their own destiny.

The most recent report on what The Voice might look like is contained in the Australian Government’s [2021 Indigenous Voice Co-design Process Report](#). However, the model of the Voice will be determined by the Parliament after the referendum, and after consultations. The Referendum Working Group has agreed broad and inclusive consultation with First Nations peoples and communities is critical to ensure the final Voice model reflects the views of First Nations communities.

While the referendum will establish the Voice, Parliament will still need to legislate the structure of how the body will operate. The referendum will enshrine the process but not the substance of the Voice to Parliament.

The Voice to Parliament will not have any veto or judiciary powers and will not be a third chamber. Parliament will still have control over decision making. The purpose of the Voice is to allow Aboriginal voices to be consulted on matters that affect them. Members will be chosen by First Nations people. **R**

Watch the short [video](#) from Bishop Mark Coleridge on behalf of the Australian Catholic Bishops in support of the Uluru Statement From The Heart. More information [here](#).

Court

INDEPENDENT ACCOMMODATION FOR OVER 55

Rosalie Court is a community development comprised of 28 units, built in a friendly neighbourhood in Smithton.

EACH MODERN HOME INCLUDES:

- Two bedrooms
- One bathroom
- Generous living areas

THE COURT IS:

• Features wall-to-wall carpeting

• Includes a drive

• Includes a parking space

• Includes a storage room

• Includes a laundry room

• Includes a kitchen

• Includes a bathroom

• Includes a living area

• Includes a dining area

• Includes a terrace

• Includes a garden

• Includes a driveway

• Includes a parking space

• Includes a storage room

• Includes a laundry room

• Includes a kitchen

• Includes a bathroom

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• Includes a dining area

OUR WORK TOGETHER



Launching the Rosalie Court development at Smithton, Tasmania were (l-r) Gerard Blizzard, Mayor of Circular Head Council, Guy Barnett MP, Minister for State Development, Construction and Housing, Mark Gaetani, then-State President, St Vincent de Paul Society, Ben Wilson, Centacare Evolve Housing's CEO and Executive General Manager, Belinda Clarke.

\$10M affordable home project for Smithton

Work is set to commence on an affordable home development in Smithton, on the state's north-west coast, in a partnership between the St Vincent de Paul Society, the Tasmanian Government and Centacare Evolve Housing. The project is budgeted to cost around \$10 million.

Centacare Evolve Housing Chief Executive Officer, Mr Ben Wilson, said that working in partnership with government and partners including St Vincent de Paul Society, the group is delivering effective housing and community programs, such as this one, to be named Rosalie Court, supporting people in need from a diversity of backgrounds and circumstances.

'Centacare Evolve Housing is committed to investing in regional communities across Tasmania in an effort to improve access to social and affordable housing,' he said.

'Centacare Evolve Housing and the St Vincent de Paul Society have made a long-term commitment to Circular Head and look forward to increasing their presence in the community. We are working closely with Council to identify areas of need, and progress developments, which includes Rosalie Court in Smithton,' Mr Wilson added.

The development will feature 28 modern, two-bedroom homes for low-income people over 55 years of age. St Vincent de Paul Society has committed \$2.5m to be used to build affordable housing on the Northwest Coast from



Artist's impression of a typical home to be built at Rosalie Court.

the proceeds of the transfer of Mt St Vincent Nursing Home, in Ulverstone, in 2019.

The Society's State Council was committed to ensuring that funds that came from the Northwest Coast were spent on a project in the region; specifically on a project that benefitted people over 55 and with a focus on affordable housing.

Rosalie Court is expected to be completed by June 2023. It is situated within walking distance of the Smithton town centre and is close to medical facilities.

Many factors contribute to housing insecurity: single women over 55 often do not have large superannuation funds to fall back on and even less savings. Low-income couples are also vulnerable to economic pressures.

Studies consistently show that permanent housing creates value for communities and taxpayers through a reduction in services such as the justice system, hospitals and health, and services for mental health and addiction. **R**



Uday Regmi offers a welcome to a Vinnies NT accommodation unit.



Alice Le at work in the Vinnies NT Bakhita Centre office in Darwin.

Stories of Hope from the Top End

BY LUCI LLOYD

St Vincent de Paul Society's Northern Territory Community Housing Program supports people as they transition from homelessness to Vinnies transitional and short-medium term accommodation to longer term options. We focus on education and training, providing individuals and families with the skills they need to be confident to manage their own properties for the future, and so helping break the cycle of homelessness.

Christmas 2022 was extra special, with six successful households moving forward on their housing journey.

Our Ted Collins Village in Coconut Grove houses individuals, partners, and families within our 20 two-bedroom units. Some residents have never experienced the responsibility of managing their own home. Everyday things like power and utility management, grocery shopping and budgeting are simple skills developed and nurtured by Vinnies Case Workers.

Thanks to the support of our dedicated Team we are very excited to help transition two of our Ted Collins households into Territory Housing.

A joint Christmas Celebration for Companions of Park Lodge, Bakhita Men's and Bakhita Women's hostels was organised and celebrated at the Bakhita Centre in Coconut Grove. These Vinnies locations support a hostel-type living, with shared facilities and private rooms.

Vinnies supports weekly BBQ's to encourage mingling

and friendships to be forged between Volunteers, Members, Staff and Companions. We are grateful to be able to transition four of our Bakhita Centre residents to more permanent and suitable accommodation over the Christmas period.

Also during the festive season the St Vincent de Paul Society NT was able to offer or deliver Vinnies Christmas Hampers to all our Community Housing Program companions. This annual support effort requires a huge amount of planning and logistics orchestrated by Volunteers, Members and Staff and was able to include our Hostel living companions and Ted Collins Village companions.

Vinnies Programs lift our Territory community by helping to break the cycle of Homelessness. Our Community Housing Programs companions had a wonderful Christmas thanks to support from community donations, corporate sponsors, Government partners and our dedicated Volunteers, Members and Staff.

The success of these Companions can now be shared with more Territorians, as Vinnies begins the Community Housing cycle again, helping more people who are living rough. Our companions, with their challenges, their strength and resilience, inspire us daily to do more. They are our blessing. **R**

Luci Lloyd is Marketing and Fundraising Coordinator, St Vincent de Paul Society (NT) Inc.



From shy boy to centre stage

Jamal attends one of the Society's reading programs in Victoria, like the one pictured.

What does success and confidence feel like for an 11-year-old boy who once struggled to speak up in class?

The answer is delivering a solo music performance on stage to rapturous applause at his class concert last year.

'It made me feel so happy,' says Jamal*.

'There was a lot of clapping. I felt amazing. It made me want to do more. Perform more.'

Jamal attributes his growing resilience to taking part in one of the education programs run by St Vincent de Paul Society Victoria.

'Without the confidence I got from the program, I don't think I would have been able to perform by myself. I would have wanted my teacher next to me'" he says.

'I was shy before. I liked playing guitar, but I was scared and I didn't like playing in front of people because I didn't know how they would react.'

Vinnies is providing a solution in its much-loved one-to-one literacy and education support programs. The sessions support the all-important social and emotional development of students that research shows underpin all academic development and encourages lifelong learning.

Jamal's mother Salma, grew up in a Ugandan refugee camp after her parents fled the war in South Sudan, says that when online schooling began, she noticed Jamal barely spoke during lessons.

'He wouldn't say much at all. He was shy, missing his friends and missing his dad,' she says.

Jamal was only five years old when his father died after a short illness.

'But now his communication has really improved. I see him giggling and talking loudly, and I think those are the improvements he got from the Vinnies' reading program.'

Across the state, Vinnies Victoria has eight dedicated free programs that help students shine. The Dandenong program, which Jamal attends in outer Melbourne, focuses on working with students from grade 2-12. It runs each Saturday morning in the school term.

The programs provide professionally trained volunteers, educational materials and books, incursions and hands-on learning activities to create a fun and safe learning space.

Vinnies believes that access to education is the most empowering pathway out of disadvantage. Last year, almost 5,000 learning hours were provided to 3,241 students. Suzi Maxwell-Wright, a coordinator and former high school teacher, describes how important early intervention is for all children.

'By the time students get to high school, the ones who haven't been adequately supported will fall through the cracks very quickly,' Ms Maxwell-Wright says.

'So educational foundations of social, emotional and academic literacy really need to be built at a young age when children are developing skills, confidence, the ability to form social connections and hopefully a desire to learn.'

'Promoting this love of learning is exactly what our education programs do.'

Salma adds, 'You see the joy in my children's faces when they come home. Jamal's father would be so proud of how far he has come. He was always encouraging him to do his best.'

Jamal says, 'I want to thank the St Vincent de Paul Society volunteers for everything they do. My teachers at school say I'm improving fast and to keep it up. That makes me feel good. And makes me want to keep doing more.' **R**

Names have been changed to protect privacy.

Respected new chair for Concerned Catholics Canberra–Goulburn

Concerned Catholics Canberra Goulburn is entering its sixth year with a new chairperson, the widely respected Catholic leader, Francis Sullivan, who headed the church's Truth Justice and Healing Council in responding to the Royal Commission on the Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Mr Sullivan says that in the face of the resistance of the Church hierarchy to desperately needed reform, CCCG has provided an enlivening forum for people seeking a church that follows the path of Jesus Christ.

'In 2023 we aim to provide a range of opportunities to assist people in deepening their faith journey and to keep engaged with the unfolding synodal process.

'While the steps by most of our bishops toward a more open and inclusive church are small, there

has been more acceptance of discourse on issues including women's role in the church, the place of lay leadership and the position of LGBTQI+ faithful.

'These issues drew some attention at this year's Plenary Council, in discussions which might not have occurred without the preparatory work and advocacy of CCCG in concert with the Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform.

'An issue of central importance to Australia will be the referendum on the Voice to Parliament, enshrining in the Constitution the means to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to provide advice to the Parliament on policies and projects that impact their lives, he said. **R**

SVDP Canberra/Goulburn launches workplace giving program

With guest speakers at the 28 February launch including Hon. Dr. Andrew Leigh MP, Assistant Minister for Competition, Charities and Treasury, the Society in Canberra/Goulburn is introducing a Workplace Giving program whereby employees at participating firms and organisations can make a regular donation directly from their salary pre-tax.

Their employers then pay the donation directly to Vinnies Canberra/Goulburn and participants receive an immediate tax benefit. Additionally, leading businesses and community organisations in Canberra, including Canberra Southern Cross Club, Cantlie Recruitment and Wisdom Learning were present to indicate their support.

'Workplace Giving is a great sustainable way of raising funds for our community programs to provide practical support to people needing assistance,' said Lucy Hohnen, CEO of Vinnies Canberra/Goulburn.

'It is a powerful way to give a little each pay to support ... our community.' **R**



PHOTO: COMPAREFIBRE/UNSPASH

Amazon helped Vinnies help students get back to class

For the third year in a row, Amazon Australia assisted the St Vincent de Paul Society to provide another 1,000 Australian students with back-to-school essentials for the start of first term 2023. Items include stationery, lunchboxes and drink bottles.

The collaboration is focused on some of the families the Society knows are struggling with household expenses.

St Vincent de Paul Society then-National President Claire Victory said as the rapidly rising cost of living drives more people closer to the edge, the generosity of Amazon Australia will help many families.

'It's really pleasing to be helping another 1,000 students get what they need to participate and learn.

'This campaign has now helped 3,000 children around Australia. It's a great initiative and it's fantastic that

Amazon Australia is maintaining its strong commitment to families doing it tough,' Ms Victory added said.

Amazon's assistance in Australia is part of a global commitment to provide much-needed assistance to local communities, Amazon Australia Country Manager, Janet Menzies, said.

'Amazon is proud to once again partner with the St Vincent de Paul Society to support families with a range of back-to-school items.

'The start of the school year is an important time for every child, and every child deserves the opportunity to thrive. We hope this offers some assistance for parents setting their kids up for a successful 2023.'

The St Vincent de Paul Society will be distributing the back-to-school packs direct to families in need via its extensive membership network. **R**

Queensland Government's big Christmas gift

St Vincent de Paul Society was one of several charities chosen by the Government to receive a generous Christmas donation. **R**

Right: Queensland Vincentian Matt Nunan accepting a donation of \$100,000 from the Queensland Premier, Annastacia Palaszczuk at her Government's 2022 Christmas event..



Vinnies CEO Sleepout 2023 gears up

The annual Vinnies CEO Sleepout is the Society's main fundraiser. This year's immensely popular events are being planned for the night of Thursday 22 June (Friday 23rd in Tasmania), one of the longest and coldest nights of the year (except in the NT!).

Hundreds of CEOs, business owners and community and government leaders from around the country will sleep outdoors to support the many Australians experiencing homelessness and people at risk of homelessness.

Each CEO Sleepout participant commits to raising a minimum amount of funds to help us provide essential services to the people who need them. Full information about registration, venues and donations are [here](#). **R**



Tamworth joins the Return and Earn scheme

Tamworth locals will find recycling even easier with a new large, automated Return and Earn depot opening in Taminda.

The new depot is owned and operated by the NSW St Vincent de Paul Society (Vinnies) and is the not-for-profit's eighth automated depot in the state.

Nationals Member for Tamworth Kevin Anderson said the NSW Government is proud to partner with Vinnies to help raise funds and support their work across Australia.

"The opening also coincides with an incredible milestone of 340 million containers processed at Vinnie depots across the state," Mr Anderson said.

"One of the most exciting things about return and earn is the ability for organizations to fundraise in a unique, environmentally friendly way.

"Vinnies are so important to the most vulnerable in our community, providing that critical line of support when we are most in need.

"Every little bit counts and by providing your recycling donation to Vinnies you are supporting them in their work to rebuild lives every-day.

"This is a great way to keep our streets tidy while doing your bit to support those who need it most.

The scheme is a huge success statewide and elsewhere in Australia. The Dubbo NSW Return and Earn service recently passed the 50 million container mark, a milestone number for the facility.

'Fifty million containers recycled through the Vinnies Automated Depot means \$500,000 back into the pockets of locals, with money also raised for Vinnies to continue our vital work for the community,' said Mitch Saddler, Acting Executive Director, SVDP Commercial Enterprise, Fundraising and Communications.

Tamworth Return and Earn automated depot is located at 4 Macintosh Street, Taminda. It's open from 8.30am to 3.30pm Monday to Saturday. **R**

Floods exposed flaws in the NSW housing system

BY ROBIN OSBORNE

Action needs to be taken to safeguard regional Australians against homelessness and displacement as severe weather events such as flooding become more common. This finding lies at the core of a University of NSW [report](#), *The impact of housing vulnerability on climate disaster recovery: The 2022 Northern Rivers Floods*, looking at housing vulnerability and climate change in a region devastated by severe floods in early 2022.

[The research, by UNSW's City Futures Research Centre](#), was commissioned by the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, Mission Australia, Social Futures, The Salvation Army Australia, the Australian Red Cross, and the Tenants' Union of NSW.

'The crisis has further exposed deep flaws in an already vulnerable housing system. There is an urgent need to build greater resilience into the system in the face of more frequent and severe climate disasters,' said St Vincent de Paul Society NSW's then-CEO, Jack de Groot.

'Failure to do so will push more people into a hard-to-break cycle of poverty, unable to find a stable home from which they can rebuild their lives,' he said.

'We need well-planned, well-designed social housing stock built in low-risk geographical areas. An increase in this type of social housing would go a long way in helping to house people on low incomes, help end homelessness and build resilience to the effects of climate change and natural disasters,' added Mission Australia NSW State Director, Nada Nasser.

Social Futures CEO, Tony Davies, said, 'Before the flood, we were facing an absolute housing and homelessness crisis, with rents and rough sleeping rates well above those of most capital cities. Climate change events like this highlight an urgent need for government to invest in resilient housing for communities across regional Australia.'

In February 2022, and again one month later, major floods struck the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales. The housing system in the Northern Rivers was significantly constrained before the floods, the report notes, with sale prices and rents increasing faster than inflation, social housing wait times stretched for years, and homelessness and housing compromise already numbering in the thousands.



Government efforts since the floods have focused on restoring some stability to the region, by rebuilding and so returning some of those affected by the floods to their homes. The home buyout program is moving slowly, with major decisions on re-occupation or rebuilding yet to be made.

Two public inquiries into the NSW Government's response to the floods highlighted the importance of expediting the recovery/relocation process. A CSIRO report released in February 2023 found the failure of the warning system had 'critical consequences' for thousands of people in the Northern Rivers. Federal Government support of \$15M is aimed at improving the rainfall and river gauge network but the NSW Department of Planning and Environment says the work will not be completed until mid-2025.

In other words, two rainy seasons away.

A major concern is the longer-term housing crisis in the Northern Rivers, and other regions, with a loss of private rentals that were, historically, available at a price point affordable to those whose incomes come from pensions or other government payments.

The shock to housing supply caused by the floods has accelerated this urgent and growing need for subsidised housing options. **R**

Robin Osborne is National Publications Officer, St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia.



Gympie Member Desley Neal helped set up a food and supplies station for locals impacted by the flooding of the S-E Queensland regional city.

Society helps 300 flood-hit Queensland families

BY MATT NUNAN

One year after the devastating flood event that impacted Southeast Queensland and Northern NSW it is clear how badly the flood event disrupted lives and the impacted people in many communities.

In Southeast Queensland, the February 2022 flood brought back memories of fear and anxiety experienced by those who lived through the devastating 2011 flood. Using the learnings from 2011 and flood and cyclone events since, SVDP Queensland volunteers, members and staff were able to respond quickly to the 2022 flood event.

To date we have distributed approximately \$2.0 million in assistance to around 300 families. While applications for assistance to replace household items have now ended, applications for residential structural repairs of up to \$50,000 remain open.

The SVDP Queensland Disaster Assistance Committee would like to thank local members for their support in working with companions who have been affected by the 2022 flood event. Support by members and staff to review and help flood affected families has made a large impact in places like Gympie, Caboolture, Oxley, Logan, Goodna and Ipswich. **R**



Matt Nunan is Vice President SVDP National Council of Australia.

Chopsticks to boomerangs... memories of Vincentian friendship

BY PAUL DALGLEISH

Archivist



The archival collection of the National Council contains material in formats ranging from audio tapes, photograph albums to single items of correspondence. However, when you think of archives you may not immediately imagine a set of spoons and metal chopsticks, an inlaid metal vase, a carved wooden bowl, a boomerang, carved wooden boat models, plaques, cups, keyrings, medallions, pieces of delicate embroidery, caps and shawls.

The National Council has a collection of objects presented to Vincentians attending congresses overseas or visiting twinned conferences abroad.

The variety of the objects is impressive, each reflecting the culture and arts of the host country. Each is a memento of attending a conference overseas and meeting Vincentians from the countries neighbouring Australia or from further afield; a souvenir of a visit to a community in India, Thailand, or Indonesia for example, seeing at first hand the results of overseas aid projects and spiritually connecting with the members of an overseas conference.

All these objects are preserved in the National Council collection and serve as a reminder that the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia is but one member of a wide international community devoted to good works and helping people experiencing hardship. **R**



National Council's Overseas Partnerships Program – Projects

Preparations for the inauguration of the Vidal Arul Avai Naduvam project building in Asariplam, Nagercoil Municipality in Tamil Nadu, India. Photo courtesy of Thuckalay Central Council project report.

Supporting projects identified by our overseas partner countries is an important part of the National Council's Overseas Partnership Program.

In 2022, some 23 projects to the total value of \$56,478 were supported through generous contributions by Vincentian Conferences and Councils in Australian States and Territories.

This included:

- Community development projects in Cambodia (2), India (17) and Solomon Islands (2). These enabled conferences to carry out initiatives to improve the circumstances of people and communities in need.
- Emergency Relief project funds sent to the Superior Council in Tonga as part of a regional and international response to the volcanic eruption.
- A Special Vincentian support project in Solomon Islands to support the Superior Council in visiting its conferences in outer islands.

December 2022 also saw the completion of the Vidal

Arul Avai Naduvam (VAAN) project in India. This is a large community development project supported by the Society across Australia who contributed \$AUD 83,524.00 to the construction of a community medical support centre.

The project report from the National Council of India and Thuckalay Central Council thanked the Society in Australia for its support and provided the following details about the VAAN Project Building situated at Asariplam in Nagercoil Municipality, Tamil Nadu, India.

The building is located near the Government Hospital where a large number of people travel daily up to 30-40 kms from their hometown to receive medical treatment. This often requires patients and their family finding their own accommodation, causing inconvenience and financial difficulty.

Thanks to the VAAN project, the hospital patients and their relatives can stay in the VAAN building during their treatment providing comfort, support and financial relief.

For further information relating to the Overseas Partnerships Program and its projects please contact overseasdevelopment@svdp.org.au **R**



St Vincent de Paul Society

NATIONAL COUNCIL of AUSTRALIA Inc.

good works

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PRIVACY STATEMENT

The St Vincent de Paul Society of Australia respects the privacy of the people it assists, our members, volunteers and employees. As a result, the names of clients, members, volunteers or employees featured in this report may have been changed and pictorial models used.

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